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# THE CLASSICAL WEEKLY

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In view of the interest aroused by Madame Montessori's recent visit to this country, it may be worth while to call the attention of the readers of THE CLASSICAL WEEKLY to the fact that the chief features of the Montessori method (as described in the first article on the subject in McClure's Magazine, in May, 1911) for teaching young children are to be found in the educational text-book of Quintilian, who lived and taught in the first century A.D. and was Rome's greatest school-teacher. In a letter published in McClure's Magazine for October, 1911, I alluded briefly to this similarity. Madame Montessori emphasizes the use of the sense of touch in the first steps, especially in the teaching of writing:

There can be no doubt that the teaching of young children to write, without the slightest strain or effort, is the most striking and impressive of Maria Montessori's achievements.

Learning to write necessarily precedes learning to read:

First to write and then to read—for her method inverts the usual order in which these accomplishments are acquired.

The gradual improvement of her method is described as follows:

The apparatus that Maria Montessori had used in training feeble-minded pupils to write was both expensive and in some ways unpractical. She had begun with letters elaborately carved in wood. Then she had devised colored letters pasted on paste-board, which she taught her pupils to trace, first with the forefinger, then with the first two fingers, and finally with a little stick, to teach the motion of the pen.

At a later time

she, with her teachers, set to work to fabricate writing-letters of large size and of coarse black sandpaper, which they pasted on very smooth square white cards. . . . They were afterward supplemented by numerous letters cut out of paper, for laying on a table when the children tried to make words.

The children pass their fingers over the rough surface of the sandpaper and thus learn the forms of the letters through the sense of touch. It is furthermore stated that they do not "learn letters according to their regular succession in the alphabet".

With all this compare the words of Quintilian 1.1.24 ff. (I quote from Watson's translation in Bohn's Classical Library):

For that at least, which I see practiced in regard

to most children, by no means pleases me, namely, that they learn the names and <alphabetical> order of the letters before they learn their shapes. This method hinders their recognition of them, as, while they follow their memory that takes the lead <rather, 'as long as they are under the influence of that memory image, i.e. of names and order, which came to them first'>, they do not fix their attention on the forms of the letters. This is the reason why teachers, even when they appear to have fixed them sufficiently in the minds of children, in the straight <i.e. alphabetical> order in which they are usually first written, make them go over them again the contrary way, and confuse them by variously changing the arrangement, until their pupils know them by their shape, not by their place. It will be best for children, therefore, to be taught the appearances and names of the letters at once <i.e. simultaneously>, as they are taught those of men. . . . I do not disapprove, however, the practice, which is well known, of giving children, for the sake of stimulating them to learn, ivory figures of letters to play with, or whatever else can be invented, in which that infantine age may take delight, and which may be pleasing to handle, look at, or name. But as soon as the child shall have begun to trace the forms of the letters, it will not be improper <inutile> that they should be cut for him, as exactly as possible, on a board, that his style <stilus> may be guided along them as along grooves, for he will then make no mistakes, as on wax (since he will be kept in by the edge on each side, and will be unable to stray beyond the boundary); and, by following these sure traces rapidly and frequently, he will form his hand <firmabit articulos>, and not require the assistance of a person to guide his hand with his own hand placed over it.

The most striking agreement between the two pedagogues is the utilization of the sense of touch in learning to write, and this involves also the learning of writing before reading. This strikes me as a distinctly common-sense method—though I profess no knowledge of primary methods. The other point of agreement is the learning of the letters without regard to their order in the alphabet. Besides, Madame Montessori's method is entirely in harmony with Quintilian's advice, 1.1.20: "Let his instruction be an amusement to him; let him be questioned, and praised". It will be noticed that Madame Montessori's original plan of using incised wooden blocks comes nearest to Quintilian's plan. She abandoned this on account of its expense. The substitution of sandpaper made it necessary to find another method for teaching control of the pencil.

Her original method (and that of Quintilian) seems more economical in every way except financially. Quintilian does not, so far as I know, receive credit from Madame Montessori for suggesting these ideas to her. Probably she is unaware of the fact, though she no doubt read the passage long ago, even if only in translation.

I would observe finally that I had to consult Quintilian's words in the original in order to understand what the English translator meant. An English translation is often a help in reading a Latin book, but I have yet to find one English translation which is entirely intelligible without recourse to the original<sup>1</sup>. B. L. U.

### THE DIRECT METHOD

The discussions of the use of the Direct Method in teaching Latin show that there are still a large number of teachers who prefer to abide by the old method. The reason for this, it seems to me, is not so much a doubt whether the Direct Method will accomplish what is claimed for it as a difference in purpose in teaching Latin. If that be true, it is evident that we shall not come to an understanding about methods until we agree in purpose.

If the main purpose in teaching Latin is to be formal mental discipline, if its educational value is to be measured according as it is distasteful and as it strains the mind to overcome meaningless difficulties, the traditional method unquestionably serves the purpose very well. But if the purpose of teaching Latin is to have the pupil learn the language, the present search for a new method is the best evidence that the old does not accomplish this. And it cannot be expected to do so. The old method is to teach Latin by means of translation and grammar. But everybody knows that to translate well is a task worthy of the best efforts of men as well versed in the two languages concerned as they are in their own mother-tongue. In order to translate, it is necessary first to understand thoroughly the original, to penetrate its very spirit, and then to restate it as closely as can be done in the idiom of the other language. The task, then, presupposes a thorough acquaintance with both languages. Says Dr. G. Stanley Hall (Educational Problems 2.262):

This art of many arts, translation, the tyros can only parody, and their babble-babel is a confusion of tongues. They cannot translate anything worth while, and the classicist who looks only at the ideal translation when he speaks <of the value of translation> in public, and not at the actual performance of his pupils in the class-room, lives in a Fool's Paradise.

The 'translating' done in teaching Latin is merely a mechanical device by which to *find*, through the application of fixed rules, a multitude of which must be continually kept in mind, the sense of the original. Certainly the process can be only artificial and mechanical.

Grammar is the *science* of language. The formulating of its rules is the result of careful observation and investigation on the part of men familiar with the facts that make up the rules. In all other sciences that method is now considered the best method of teaching which leads pupils, not from generalizations to the specific, but which leads over the same road by which the scientist reached his conclusions, through observation of phenomena and facts to the discovery of laws and rules. Why should not this be the right method also in teaching the science of language? If a practical way of doing this has not yet been found, that only shows that we must continue to search for the method suitable to language-teaching.

That the method of teaching Latin now in vogue is an excellent discipline can not be denied. But the question raised by many, Is it worth the price, is justified. And if people in general are convinced that other studies can be found which furnish an equally good mental discipline and at the same time make possible the acquisition of knowledge which is itself worth the time, then how, with our strongest convictions to the contrary, are we going to prevent our discipline being thrown overboard, unless we offer with our Latin something that is worth while, not only in discipline but also in content? But if we can teach Latin so that after a reasonably short time the pupil may be able to *read* Latin authors with pleasure and due appreciation of the content, instead of laboriously deciphering them by 'turning' them into English—and oh, such English!, then it will be possible to retain Latin in our High School curriculum. And there is no reason why a rational method which aims at actually learning the language should not offer just as good a discipline as a method devised merely for the sake of discipline. But the fact is that this method was not devised even for that purpose, but it is the spontaneous outgrowth of a condition, the condition that teachers of Latin no longer knew Latin as they did formerly, but were able to teach it only by some such mechanical device. And the discipline-sentiment was only adduced afterwards as an argument in favor of retaining this makeshift method.

A common argument in favor of the current method is that its main purpose is to furnish a training in English. The reply to this, that the same amount of time and energy applied directly to the study of good English authors and to English composition would yield larger returns, can be contradicted, but can hardly be disproven. But if our

<sup>1</sup> Reference may be made to a paper by Professor Bennett, An Ancient Schoolmaster's Message to Present-Day Teachers, which dealt interestingly with Quintilian, in The Classical Journal 4.149-164. This article drew forth a brief paper by Mr. Roy K. Hack, Quintilian Again, in The Classical Journal 5.161-164. C. K.